Study helps kids by helping moms

Ferol Mennen, an associate professor with the USC School of Social Work, will use a new $2.5 million grant from the Administration for Children and Families to test a promising approach to alleviate depression as a strategy to improve the lives of both mother and child.

“There are many clearly established negative outcomes for kids who have depressed moms,” Mennen said. “Intervening in the mother’s depression should improve her depression and make her more motivated to seek employment and improve her health, but we also think it will improve child outcomes.”

Mennen will work in concert with Children’s Institute to test a group therapy approach.

**Depression affects more than half of all mothers in Early Head Start programs, impairing their parenting abilities and increasing the vulnerability of their children to poor school and life outcomes.**

**USC School of Social Work maintains strong presence at annual social work conference**  

**Professor honored with lifetime achievement award from national social work organization**

**New book offers practical tools for working with communities and social service agencies**
Professor inspired by personal experiences to help those in crisis

In the sweltering summer heat of California’s Central Valley, with the low throb of a swamp cooler rumbling through the frame of her grandmother’s Victorian house, Marleen Wong learned a secret that would change the course of her life.

As the eldest grandchild, she had been her grandmother’s confidant from a young age, helping her navigate Fresno’s public transit system and translating from Cantonese to English and back again during errands into the city. Now she sat at the kitchen table, just 12 years old, listening as her grandmother described being sold into servitude as a child in Macau.

“When she was 5 years old, a rich couple came to her home,” Wong said. “Her mother pushed her toward these people and said, ‘This will be your mother and father now.’ She looked at her and didn’t understand. She never saw her mother again.”

Brought to San Francisco just before the earthquake of 1906, her grandmother helped look after the couple’s young children despite being one herself. One day, the father was killed in the crossfire of a gang shootout in Chinatown.

“She was treated differently after that,” Wong said. “The children she was helping raise, the mother of the family began to understand what it was like to be an orphan, to be alone.”

At 17, her grandmother was released from servitude and placed in an arranged marriage with a man 20 years her senior. The new couple set down roots in Fresno and opened a successful wholesale food business.

Wong’s grandmother, despite the trauma and chaos of her childhood, found peace in her new home, cultivating strong ties with the local Chinese community and establishing herself as the matriarch of the family.

“In a profound way, it’s led me to a very deep interest in crisis intervention and disaster response and recovery,” Wong said. “Out of this terrible life crisis, in which she had been lost to her parents and sold because they were in terrible poverty, she came to be a very joyful person. Those early losses weren’t predictive of her life to come.”

Inspired by her grandmother’s resilience, Wong pursued a career in mental health and recovery from trauma, ultimately becoming an internationally known expert who has been called to the scenes of numerous national and international disasters, including the terrorist attacks in Oklahoma and New York cities, school shootings in Columbine and Newtown, earthquakes in Japan and China, and the BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico.

Before assuming her current role with the USC School of Social Work as a clinical professor and associate dean of field education, she led crisis response and recovery for Los Angeles Unified School District and helped develop a popular evidence-based program to relieve post-traumatic stress, depression, and anxiety among children traumatized by violence and bullying.

In addition to her grandmother’s influence, Wong traces much of her career success to her family’s strong Christian faith and the values of stewardship and altruism emphasized by her parents.

“I had to think not about myself but what I could do for others,” she said.

Interested in social work from the start, Wong got a summer job in Los Angeles with...
Clinical professor Marleen Wong met with nuns in Tacloban, Philippines, during recovery efforts following Typhoon Haiyan.

“It’s not a death sentence to a happy life,” she said. “There are always turns in the road where people can intervene. There are still things we can do to make a difference.”

After completing her degree at USC in 1971, Wong worked in outpatient and inpatient psychiatry at Saint John’s Hospital for several years before joining the Los Angeles Unified School District as a psychiatric social worker. She was content to remain in that role until the first big crisis of her tenure, a shooting at 49th Street Elementary School.

As children left their classrooms and spilled onto the playground one afternoon in 1984, a 28-year-old man who lived across the street opened fire from a bay window with a high-powered rifle and two shotguns.

A 10-year-old girl died on the scene, a 24-year-old man jogging nearby was hit by gunfire and died several months later, and a dozen other people were injured. The perpetrator killed himself as police officers stormed the house.

“It was one of the first school shootings that received big media attention,” Wong said. “We knew about counseling but we didn’t know about trauma counseling. The word trauma had never been applied to children before.”

Coupled with the sharp uptick in gang violence in Los Angeles in the 80s, the shooting spurred district officials to establish a crisis response team. Wong volunteered to help develop the program, again driven by a sense of duty and conscience.

“They all saw things from a different perspective,” she said. “Kids just didn’t come back to school. Teachers were traumatized. They were in shock and fear. It had always been assumed that school was a safe place.”

As a result of the efforts of Wong and her colleagues, the district became the first in the nation to have a districtwide crisis response and recovery team. After the Los Angeles riots of 1992, school leaders asked Wong to lead the mental health and trauma recovery process for all schools.

Although no campus had been physically damaged, racial and ethnic tensions had flared up among teachers and school employees. Wong spent the following summer leading group sessions and guiding conversations about their personal and professional experiences in an effort to bring them together.

“One particularly memorable discussion centered on a white firefighter who had been shot in the face while battling a blaze during the rioting. Some teachers lamented the fact that he had been injured while trying

TRAUMA | continued on page 11
**Keeping score**  
*By Vincent Lim*

Many state, local, and national organizations have compiled publicly available data from sources such as the U.S. Census Bureau to produce health scorecards or rankings that seek to offer meaningful information about the health of different communities.

In developing these scorecards, questions arise about the precise relationship between commonly used community-level indicators such as the total number of health care facilities in a particular community and health outcomes for members of that community. Even less is known about the relationship between those indicators and health outcomes among specific segments of the population such as older adults in the community.

The USC Edward R. Roybal Institute on Aging at the USC School of Social Work is currently leading a pilot project to study the potential connections between factors such as air quality and the health of older adults in a specific neighborhood.

Donald Lloyd, a research associate professor at the USC Roybal Institute who is the principal investigator for the study, hopes his work will inform the development of improved scorecards that provide more accurate insights about the well-being of older adult populations in areas like Los Angeles County.

“We hope the study will make scorecards more powerful tools for public health planning and interventions, and we hope it will inform the design of future studies of health and place,” Lloyd said.

Supported by a subaward from the National Institute on Aging through the USC/UCLA Center on Biodemography and Population Health, the study aims to move beyond practical concerns and instinctual biases that can influence the selection of variables for scorecards.

“This is a step toward making a more rational, evidence-based choice of what indicators to use to compare places and health capacity,” Lloyd said. “Instead of choosing measures intuitively or because they’ve been used before, we’re evaluating the usefulness of these various measures for indicating community health by comparing them directly with the health of communities.”

**School strengthens presence at annual confab**  
*By Charli Engelhorn*

**Among the highlights of the USC School of Social Work’s strong presence at the 18th Annual Society for Social Work and Research (SSWR) conference this year were more than 25 presentations by students in the school’s PhD program, an invited symposium featuring professors Michalle Mor Barak and John Brekke, and a doctoral student panel discussion that included assistant professor Tamika Gilreath.**

“The Society for Social Work and Research holds the profession’s most important annual research conference and is the venue for the cultivation of emerging scholars, cutting-edge research topics, and research networks,” said Dean Marilyn Flynn. “The extent of our presence is a public reflection of our commitment to social work science and scholarship—a hallmark of our school.”

During the four-day conference, attendees had the opportunity to participate in many of the 600 original symposia, roundtables, workshops, papers, and posters, as well as interact with social work scholars and professionals from around the country.

Mor Barak, who is the Lenore Stein-Wood and William S. Wood Professor in Social Work and Business in a Global Society, joined Brekke, the Frances G. Larson Professor of Social Work Research, to discuss the future of social work doctoral education and the next generation of scholars and researchers.

Their presentation centered on their joint paper titled “Social Work Science and Identity Formation for Doctoral Scholars within Intellectual Community,” a key topic of discussion at the Islandwood Roundtable on Social Work Science held last summer in Seattle, Washington.

Brekke and Mor Barak proposed that social work is an integrative scientific discipline, and that the development of an identity as a scientist and creation of intellectual communities are intricately linked to the future transformation of doctoral education to fully prepare the students for professorships or other roles in academia. The concept is innovative in the field, and Mor Barak said the response from the attendees was positive.

“There was a lively discussion after our presentation from the learned audience of colleagues interested in the topic,” said Mor Barak. “Most attendees thought this [concept] is a much needed direction for doctoral education, and they liked the ideas of social work as an integrative science, ...
Professor receives lifetime achievement honor

Returning to the USC School of Social Work after a stint as the inaugural director of the Institute for the Advancement of Social Work Research, Kathleen Ell had a burning desire to pursue a rigorous research career.

During a meeting with Dean Marilyn Flynn, she struck a deal: If she wasn’t fully funded by a well-regarded federal agency in three years, she would go back to teaching early morning classes. Despite having never served as principal investigator on a research project, Ell fought through dozens of rejection letters and successfully established herself as a pioneering researcher on issues such as quality of life, chronic illness, depression, and access to health care.

“If there was ever a person who deserved an opportunity to express her passion, it was Kathy,” Flynn said during a recent ceremony to honor Ell with the Knee/Wittman Lifetime Achievement Award from the National Association of Social Workers (NASW). “She does honor to the Knee/Wittman Award in the impact she has had on vulnerable populations. She has never stopped, she has never rested.”

The award, one of the highest honors bestowed by the organization, recognizes individuals who have made exemplary contributions to the field of health and mental health research and practice. As the Ernest P. Larson Professor of Health, Ethnicity, and Poverty, Ell has secured more than $17 million in federal funding during the past 20 years to explore medical, psychological, and social factors that affect the health and well-being of low-income individuals.

“You’ve made sure that your research was focused on the most vulnerable populations, the most underserved populations, so you could figure out how to best serve those who needed the most help,” said Angelo McClain, CEO of NASW and president of the NASW Foundation.

He lauded Ell’s groundbreaking clinical research on cancer screening, major depression, psychological distress, and morbidity and mortality, as well as her pursuit of interdisciplinary partnerships and a recent focus on issues faced by military service members, veterans, and their families.

“It is very important to NASW that we are able to be here to give you this honor and to give you the proper due respect that your distinguished career merits,” McClain said.

After accepting the award, Ell described several moments that inspired her lifelong commitment to improving the lives of people in need. As a young girl, she overheard a group of church leaders discussing strategies to get rid of a new minister who wanted to open the congregation to blacks. She promptly marched into the room and reprimanded the board of elders, two pastors, and her father, who served as president of the congregation.

Ell, as a recent college graduate and newly minted social work assistant at Barnes

Scorecards | from page 4

Sometimes conclusions are drawn by assuming that there is a direct link between factors such as the types of food establishments in a community and particular health consequences like cardiovascular disease, when the explanation for this statistical association is frequently more complex.

The study will bring together community-level data from sources such as the U.S. Census Bureau and health data about individuals from sources like the California Health Interview Survey to determine how well certain indicators represent the health of aging adults.

The USC Roybal Institute is uniquely positioned to engage in this work because its mission is to advance research whose goal is to enhance optimal aging for persons in minority and low-income communities.

“It is critical to see the implications of our research for practice,” said William Vega, provost professor, executive director of the USC Roybal Institute, and a coinvestigator on the study. “We hope the results of our work can be shared with direct service providers and will inform how they evaluate population health and the needs of those who they serve.”

Study leaders also hope to contribute to research as well as practice.

“Some people in academic research settings aren’t interested in doing applied research,” Lloyd said. “At the same time, many people out in the field such as health systems planners and policy makers don’t necessarily have the depth of research experience to make appropriate judgments about what will be best indicators to use for their populations of interest.”

Study data will be drawn from Los Angeles County, a densely populated part of the country that is well suited for the implementation of place-based interventions such as the opening of a community health center.

“The project responds to the growing recognition—particularly in the context of a rapidly changing American health care landscape—that a valid and consistently measured system of population health indicators is necessary to maximize public health investments,” Lloyd said. “It is designed to be locally relevant and responsive to the local stakeholder priorities and to capitalize on their intimate knowledge of the real world of health care of the aged.”

Ell | continued on page 9
Retaining talent

Gretchen Heidemann had a number of major events occur during summer 2013. Not only did the USC School of Social Work postdoctoral research associate finish her dissertation, receive her doctorate degree, and get married, but she also received an invitation to work with Dr. Bruce Jansson, the school’s Margaret W. Driscoll/Louise M. Clevenger Professor of Social Policy and Administration, on his federally funded health advocacy research project. Jansson, who was instrumental in recruiting Heidemann to the doctoral program, donated $38,000 to fund her new position. In October 2012, Jansson received a federal award from the Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute (PCORI) to conduct a pilot project titled Improving Healthcare Outcomes through Advocacy. He credits Heidemann for helping secure the award by discovering information pertinent to the funding and for helping to write the project proposal.

However, Heidemann did not participate in the first year of the research project because she wanted to focus on completing her studies and other life events.

“Last spring, I was busy writing my dissertation and planning my wedding,” said Heidemann, who was married two days after the conferment of her doctorate.

As the home of seven scholarly publications specializing in social work and related fields, the USC School of Social Work has derived many benefits from its journal holdings, from increasing the school’s academic reputation to generating a wealth of expertise on the vagaries of the publication process.

In turn, the journals are aided by the knowledge and abilities of leading researchers and scholars who serve as editors of these publications, as well as administrative support provided by the school to three of the journals. Paul Maiden, vice dean of academic and student affairs, sees many advantages to hosting the academic publications.

“Giving the journals a home is good for the school in terms of visibility and it’s good for the journal editors who are here because it gives them support,” said Maiden, who has served as editor of the Journal of Workplace Behavioral Health for more than a decade. “We’re very fortunate to have a dean who supports this the way she does.”

“As editors, our faculty members influence the scholarly direction of these international and national journals, which as a collective effort is a considerable contribution to social work scholarly publication activities. It definitely contributes to the visibility of the school.”

Haluk Soydan

Journal holdings bolster school’s visibility

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Haluk Soydan
international journals becomes a public benefit," he said. “There is a collective awareness of how these journals are run.” Maiden echoed that sentiment, noting that because many members of the school’s faculty serve on editorial boards or as reviewers for leading journals, others affiliated with the school often seek their advice about where to submit journal articles or how to boost their publication rate.

He also noted that the school and its journal holdings create a sort of feedback loop, with improvements in one being reflected in the other.

“As we reframe and advance our curriculum, it has a ripple effect that has also been beneficial,” he said. “It just ramps up the quality of the submissions and the volume of the submissions.”

As senior editor of the Journal of HIV/AIDS & Social Services, associate professor Helen Land has seen a similar effect on the reputation of the journal. Initially a small publication with many qualitative articles, the journal has undergone a significant expansion in recent years, particularly after being acquired by the USC School of Social Work.

“It has just taken off and become a higher-impact journal,” Land said. “The submission has gone way up; it’s probably tripled or quadrupled in the past year. People in all fields are submitting to the journal.”

Land was among a group of researchers concerned about the emergence of HIV/AIDS who developed the journal in the early 1990s, and she served as a consulting editor before being named senior editor last year. Aided by several coeditors at other institutions, she shepherds individual issues through the publication process and guides the overall direction of the publication.

“In the past six months or so, we’ve invited renowned investigators from across the country to join our editorial board,” she said. “It’s really brought the journal a lot of attention.”

Land and her colleagues who serve as journal editors are the final arbiters of the content that appears in the publications. They are responsible for selecting knowledgeable scholars to review the articles and making tough decisions about whether to accept or reject a submission.

“Being a journal editor is a labor of love,” Maiden said. “It’s a commitment to my own scholarship, and I think everyone who does this feels the same way.”

**HEIDEMANN | from page 6**

“There was little time to conduct a thorough job search.”

Despite completing several job interviews, Heidemann did not have anything lined up for her postdoctoral work until Jansson called her into his office and asked her to join his project.

“I realized I needed her help in producing data and articles from this grant in summer 2013, and I was delighted she was available,” Jansson said. “I was also delighted to help subsidize her work on the project, where she has been instrumental.”

The research project involves surveying 300 nurses, social workers, and medical residents in eight acute-care hospitals in Los Angeles to examine the extent to which they engage in patient and policy advocacy to address such issues as patient ethical rights, culturally competent care, and community-based care.

Jansson said Heidemann directly contributed to the project by initiating articles based on project data and using that data to develop the first tools for measuring levels of engagement in advocacy efforts by health care professionals.

Heidemann also helped develop predictor variables to gauge why some health professionals engage in considerable advocacy on behalf of their patients and others do not. Her work continues to be a boon to the journal in that she actively communicates with other project stakeholders and attends conferences to make presentations about their findings.

Although she said the USC School of Social Work chose her in a sense, Heidemann couldn’t be happier to have the opportunity to seamlessly transition from the doctoral program into a postdoctoral position at the university.

“It is a stimulating environment, full of endless opportunities to grow my social science research skills and networks,” she said. “I feel incredibly grateful for this opportunity and Dr. Jansson’s belief in me. I would also like to thank [associate dean of research] Charles Kaplan, as well as Dr. [Michalle] Mor Barak and Dr. [Erick] Guerrero, the cochairs of the Management, Organizations, and Policy Transformations research cluster, for working hard to help establish this position. It is exciting to be able to contribute to the work going on in that cluster.”

Heidemann said she is not sure how this work will contribute to her future as a social work researcher or how Jansson’s donation will ultimately change her life.

“Only time will tell,” she said. “The position is allowing me to engage intellectually on both theoretical and real-world levels about solutions to our nation’s troubled health care system. I am gaining skills in writing grants for federal and private funding, enhancing my statistical skills in instrument development, and working collaboratively with an interdisciplinary and high-powered group of stakeholders. I can only imagine where these skills might take me in the future.”

Jansson said he is confident that Heidemann will achieve success in the future. “I have no doubt that Gretchen will make major contributions to research in coming years.”

Bruce Jansson

“I was delighted to help subsidize her work on the project. I have no doubt that Gretchen will make major contributions to research in coming years.”

Bruce Jansson

Photo/Johann R. Liang
As the profession of social work becomes increasingly specialized and focused on clinical practices that help individuals and groups, two faculty members at the USC School of Social Work are hoping to bring renewed attention and energy to a wider perspective of the field.

A new book authored by clinical professor Murali Nair and assistant professor Erick Guerrero seeks to increase understanding of one-on-one or with families and groups, agencies, and other complex entities.

"There so many books on evidence-based practice in clinical settings, working one-on-one or with families and groups," Nair said. "When it comes to communities and organizations, this is the first book on evidence-based practice."

Evidence Based Macro Practice in Social Work features techniques and interventions focused on community organizing, planning, and management, coupled with real-world case studies to illustrate those various approaches.

Guerrero said evidence-based strategies at the macro level are receiving too little attention despite their proven ability to improve the well-being of vulnerable populations. For example, community interventions such as voucher programs to ensure equal housing opportunities have been quite successful.

"There are some elegant and rigorous methods and robust findings that there is evidentiary support for vouchers to improve the health and housing conditions for low-income individuals," he said.

Other management and organizational practices also deserve wider dissemination, Guerrero said, citing as an example the challenge faced by social service agencies to organize their activities using a systematic and data-driven approach.

“They get so caught up with the day-to-day activities and are often in panic mode,” he said. “If they organize their activities in the sense that they collect data, set goals, and systematically evaluate how they are performing in relation to client outcomes, they are able to improve decision making, make successful changes, and become true to their mission.”

The book discusses specific topics such as understanding organizational culture and climate, empowering clients to advocate on their own behalf, and forming a consensus and involving individuals in decision making.

Emphasizing systematic and evidence-based approaches to these sorts of activities is critical for the profession of social work, which Nair said has been historically viewed as more of an art than a science.

“Our discipline is still in an infant stage," he said. "It started only 110 years ago. Social work needs to build up its scientific basis to gain respect and attention."

The authors said they tailored the book toward graduate students who are studying how to work with organizations, communities, and neighborhood groups. The book’s case studies, drawn from Nair’s decades of experience as an educator, are designed to draw in readers with vivid storytelling.

“We intentionally wrote this book with accessible language to be able to get at the first-year students who want to understand nurturing the scientific identity among our doctoral students, and the use of intellectual communities to foster this identity.”

Both Mor Barak and Brekke have previously represented USC’s School of Social Work as speakers at the SSWR conference, including an opportunity for Brekke to present the prestigious Aaron Rosen lecture, a nominated position awarded to a member of the social work field who has accumulated a body of significant and innovative scholarship relevant to practice and the use of research to advance practice.

Also representing USC at this year’s conference was Krystal Hays, a student in the social work doctoral program who is affiliated with the school’s USC Roybal Institute on Aging. Although Hays previously attended the conference, this was her first time leading a presentation. Hays presented her research on the help-seeking behavior of African Americans, specifically churchgoers, when faced with a personal problem.

“African Americans tend to not seek help for problems, and when they do, it is often from informal sources like the church," said Hays. "This paper explored factors that might contribute to them going to see a professional, and this work helps inform the kinds of focus social workers need to have when encouraging mental health services for African Americans.”

Hays said the conference is a valuable experience and presented many opportunities to meet and learn from others.

“It’s great the school gives us the opportunity and support to go to SSWR,” said Hays. “More than anything, the networking opportunities are great, and attending the conference helped me think about my work in a different way. I attended sessions on topics similar to my interest, which inspired me to approach my topic differently.”

Flynn said she is pleased with the presence of the school’s faculty and students at the annual gathering.

“We have had outstanding participation from our PhD students during the past two years, and faculty has been involved in the creation of new interest groups,” Flynn said. “Three of our senior faculty members have run for office on the board of directors, and two have been elected. The only area where additional faculty participation is needed relates to search committee activities, where greater faculty presence is urgently required.”

"This book is about practice and the authors have done a commendable job of identifying empirical evidence that supports the efficacy of the strategies and interventions presented.”

Rino Patti
Hospital in St. Louis, Ell met her first patient, an older black woman with cancer who only had one living family member, an ill sister who could not visit. Ell visited her daily in the hospital’s basement ward for months, until she came to work one day and found an empty bed.

“I was 23 years old—I ran off and I cried,” she said. “But that experience only confirmed who I was and what I wanted to do and why I wanted to do it.”

After earning her master’s degree, Ell took a position in the coronary care unit at the LAC+USC Medical Center, where she noticed a link between heart disease, depression, and death. Physicians encouraged her to pursue research on the topic and she eventually published one of the first studies linking depression and mortality among patients with heart problems, a finding that has since been extended to other chronic conditions.

In the following decades, she completed her doctorate in social work at UCLA, became the first social worker to receive research funding from the Los Angeles chapter of the American Heart Association, and led numerous clinical trials to test strategies to improve health and mental health care for low-income individuals, particularly those with racially and ethnically diverse backgrounds.

Now in her early 70s, Ell shows no sign of slowing down. She recently received a $1.3 million award to explore whether community members trained to provide basic health information can help low-income, culturally diverse patients with chronic illnesses navigate the complex health care system.

“I haven’t lost my enthusiasm or interest. What I’m most concerned about is we don’t have enough people doing research within the social work profession and publishing in the journals that will take action.”

Kathleen Ell

These concepts and theories and who can see themselves working at a social service agency and enacting some of these practices,” Guerrero said.

Rino Patti, professor emeritus and former dean of the USC School of Social Work, said the book fills a significant need in the field for a framework that outlines the basic theoretical and practical approach of macro social work.

“In the end, this book is about practice and the authors have done a commendable job of identifying empirical evidence that supports the efficacy of the strategies and interventions presented,” he said in a review of the book. “There is as well a rich collection of cases that illustrate effective practice in diverse settings and international contexts.”

The two authors said they each brought complementary knowledge and skills to the book, which is available from Gregory Publishing and the USC bookstore.

Nair, a senior Fulbright scholar and cochair of the school’s community organization, planning, and administration concentration, emphasized his extensive expertise in management approaches. Guerrero, cofounding director of the school’s management, organization, and policy transformation research cluster, has a strong understanding of the latest research on macro social work practice in the 21st century.
to treating depressive symptoms and improving parenting skills among mothers in Head Start. The federal program offers early childhood education and parenting support to low-income families to improve the school readiness of children between infancy and 5 years of age.

A recent federal study found that 52 percent of mothers in Early Head Start programs experience some form of depression, a figure study leaders believe is similar among mothers involved in Head Start. Research has shown that persistent or untreated maternal depression interferes with the ability of mothers to be responsive, nurturing parents and ultimately leads to long-term adverse outcomes for children.

“When mothers are depressed, their children do less well in school and they are more likely to have trouble with aggression. It affects their friendships and it affects their relationships with teachers,” said Todd Sosna, senior vice president for program evaluation and improvement at Children’s Institute, a nonprofit organization whose mission is to help children in Los Angeles County’s most challenged communities heal from the trauma of family and community violence, build the confidence and skills to break through the barriers of poverty, and grow up to lead healthy, productive lives.

Mennen said depression can also increase the likelihood of heart disease, chronic pain, and weight gain among mothers, in addition to affecting their interpersonal relationships with family members and friends. Those negative consequences spill over into the parenting domain, making mothers with depression more irritable and less able to address family issues.

“Maternal depression has been related to delayed acquisition of language, slower cognitive development in infants, more difficult temperament, and more externalizing of problems in children. Mothers who are depressed just tend to have more difficulty with parenting.”

Ferol Mennen

The negative responses they expected often end up being very positive, Sosna said, improving self-esteem and providing more sources of social support that enhance their general well-being.

The intervention will be delivered to a randomized sample of 60 mothers in Head Start programs overseen by Children’s Institute; a separate group of 60 women receiving standard Head Start services will serve as a comparison sample. A national expert in IPT, Scott Stuart, will train mental health therapists to lead the sessions.

“The advantage of the intervention is that it is relatively short term, about 16 to 20 weeks,” Mennen said. “It is also a group intervention, which means it is low cost and we could possibly replicate it in other Head Start programs throughout the country.”

Head Start family support workers will screen all mothers entering Head Start during the initial stages of the study to locate potential participants. To be eligible, women must exhibit symptoms indicative of depression based on clinical cutoff points.

Testing for the full range of maternal depression is critical, Mennen said, because research has shown that even at low levels, depression can have negative effects.

“Depression is on a continuum,” Sosna added. “Some people have very severe and disabling depression, other people have significant depression but manage to go about much of their daily routine, and some people have milder forms of depression that still affect their patience or ability to interact with their children.”

By incorporating a standardized screening tool for depression, study leaders will not only be able to assess varying levels of maternal depression but also establish a better estimate of how many mothers in Head Start are affected by depressive disorders.

The therapy sessions will be held at selected Head Start centers on a weekly basis, and Sosna said Children’s Institute will provide dinner and child care to encourage regular participation by mothers.

“One of the reasons parents who are depressed don’t get services that might be available through other service providers or clinics is because there are logistical barriers, financial barriers, or child care barriers,” he said. “This is designed to be highly accessible, convenient, and engaging.”

The research team will follow mothers involved in the study and their children for two years to evaluate effects of group
IPT over time, collecting data at five points in time to assess the intervention’s influence on issues such as maternal depression, parenting behaviors, parental employment and housing, interpersonal relationships, and child behavior and school readiness.

This study represents ongoing collaboration between Mennen and Children’s Institute, and responds to a request from the Administration for Children and Families for research projects with the potential to influence services provided to multiple generations through Head Start.

“We have a very strong commitment to research-informed and evidence-based practices,” Sosna said. “This opportunity felt like a very good fit and called for a collaborative partnership with a research institute.”

In addition to working with Mennen on previous research projects, Sosna said the institute has a long-standing relationship with the USC School of Social Work by providing graduate internships, making it an easy decision to join forces to conduct the 5-year study.

Children’s Institute employs more than 100 therapists who are trained to deliver mental health services to clients in some of Southern California’s most vulnerable communities. In addition, the institute serves approximately 2,000 children each year through Head Start programs. Funding from the grant will not support therapy services, however, but instead will support research activities such as data collection and project management.

If the intervention proves effective at both reducing maternal depression and lessening its effects on child development and behavior, study leaders plan to educate other Head Start and early childhood education providers. More than 1 million children are served by Head Start programs each year, Mennen noted, an indication of the impact this study could have on the health and well-being of low-income and vulnerable families throughout the United States.

“If this intervention is successful, we will begin disseminating it to other Head Start centers around the country,” she said, “and trying to convince them that one of the ways they can improve outcomes among their children is help mothers with depression.”

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When people are depressed, their hopefulness, their expectations of success, and their appraisal of their own skills and esteem are all diminished. They have a hopeless, helpless, worthless kind of internal dialogue.”

Todd Sosna
and displaced millions in the Philippines.

Wong’s colleague, clinical associate professor Annalisa Enrile, had worked closely with organizations in the Philippines focused on combating child trafficking, and reached out to see if they needed help.

“They realized that children were more at risk than ever, especially children who were orphaned by the storm, and that they didn’t know enough about disaster recovery to even know where to start,” Wong said. “We wanted to bring our expertise in disaster response and recovery, community organizing, and bringing people together to rebuild and rethink their mission and goals.”

In addition to Enrile’s connections, the USC delegation leveraged the knowledge of clinical assistant professor Vivien Villaverde, a native of the Philippines who knew teachers, doctors, and health care workers in the community. By the time they arrived, they had attracted the attention of many involved in the recovery effort, including the acting ambassador of the U.S. embassy, the United Nations disaster response team, and the head of USAID for Southeast Asia.

After being briefed on the situation by those officials, the USC group offered guidance to nearly 90 individuals on topics such as the phases of disaster recovery, the needs of specific groups such as older adults and orphaned children, and the increased risk of child abuse. Wong described a variety of psychosocial services, including an intervention she helped develop known as Listen, Protect, Connect, which is designed for people without mental health training.

Wong plans to return to train others as the recovery progresses, including teachers and social workers, and is hoping to develop an immersion program for students to offer support and help rebuild the community.

As she reflected on her long and successful career dedicated to improving the lives of others, Wong returned again to the indelible influence of her grandmother.

“She would be proud,” she said. “I feel so lucky, so fortunate to have these experiences and this life.”

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**Marleen Wong has offered her expertise in crisis response following terrorist attacks, natural disasters, and school shootings across the globe.**

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**Iris Chi**, the Chinese-American Golden Age Association/ Frances Wu Chair for the Chinese Elderly, has been elected to the American Academy of Social Work and Social Welfare. She was formally inducted in a special ceremony held during the annual meeting of the Society for Social Work and Research. She joins fellow faculty members John Brekke, the Frances G. Larson Professor of Social Work Research, and Kathleen Ell, the Ernest P. Larson Professor of Health, Ethnicity, and Poverty, as a fellow of the highly selective society, which recognizes social work’s most prominent scholars.

**William Vega**, provost professor and executive director of the USC Roybal Institute on Aging, received the Rema Lapouse Award during the annual meeting of the American Public Health Association. The honor, granted each year to recognize excellence in psychiatric epidemiology, was conferred by the Mental Health, Epidemiology, and Applied Public Health Statistics Sections of the association following a unanimous vote. Vega also delivered the Rema Lapouse Lecture during the gathering.

A new book based on four decades of research on generational change has been published by **Vern Bengtson**, a research professor with the USC Roybal Institute on Aging. “Families and Faith: How Religion is Passed Down across Generations,” authored by Bengtson and colleagues Norella Putney and Susan Harris, describes a study conducted with 350 families known as the Longitudinal Study of Generations, which began in 1971. The book describes whether faith changes across generational gaps, using data and interviews to paint a detailed portrait of religion over time in American society.

Following a national election, assistant professor **Jeremy Goldbach** has been selected as a member-at-large on the board of directors of the Society for Social Work and Research, which seeks to advance, disseminate, and translate research that addresses issues of social work practice and policy. Goldbach joins Karen Lincoln, associate professor and associate director of the USC Roybal Institute on Aging, as a member of the board. To qualify for the position, nominees are expected to exhibit strong leadership, commitment to the organization and its mission, and experience and stature as a researcher, among other attributes.

**Suzanne Wenzel**, professor and chair of the research council at the USC School of Social Work, has been invited to serve on the 2014 Graduate Research Fellowship Program panel of the National Science Foundation. The program is designed to support graduate students specializing in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics at the master’s and doctoral level, and past fellows have included Nobel Prize winners and other prominent scholars. Applications for fellowships are reviewed by leading interdisciplinary scientists and engineers. Wenzel’s appointment reflects the increasing focus of the USC School of Social Work on expanding and strengthening its scientific orientation.

**Doctoral student Mee Young Um** received the Robert Keefe Social Work Section Student Award, which recognizes the best research abstract submitted by a student, during the annual meeting of the American Public Health Association. Her presentation focused on the effects of acculturation on the mental health outcomes of HIV-positive women.